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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003677

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: FALLUJAH/RAMADI: SUNNIS EXPRESS MEASURED
SKEPTICISM TOWARD CONSTITUTION

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MICHAEL J. ADLER,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: In meetings with Fallujah Poloff and USMC officers, Al Anbar Province Sunni Arabs have expressed skepticism toward the draft constitution. However, community leaders and ordinary residents continue to mobilize for the upcoming referendum. They have largely stated their intentions to study the text in more detail before reaching a final decision on how to vote in the October 15 referendum. Many remain hopeful that changes to the constitution will be made in coming weeks. Religious leaders in Fallujah are still urging residents to register (the deadline was extended in the province through September 7). They also appear to have decided to study the constitution in more detail before communicating formal reactions. Anbar Sunnis, overall, remain engaged in the national political process. There is not yet a sense of automatic rejection of the constitution as area leaders consider their next steps and overarching political strategy. END SUMMARY.

FALLUJANS: SKEPTICISM
MIXED WITH PRAGMATISM

[12](#). (C) Fallujah Poloff and Marine officers have met with several city leaders to discuss local reactions to the constitution. In an August 30, 2005, city council session, Vice Chairman Qassem Mashkoor Noman Al-Esawi stressed that the constitution needed "equilibrium; otherwise, there would always be instability." Sunnis, he added, remained principally concerned about federalism. He hoped all outstanding issues could be resolved by October 15. Security, he stressed, was directly tied to politics.

[13](#). (C) Engineer Fawzi Mohammed, who acts as a principal deputy of the city's reconstruction committee, stated that whether Fallujans voted yes or no, it would be the "people's decision." He noted that city leaders would be holding educational seminars -- led by sheikhs, imams and lawyers -- to urge residents to register and help educate them regarding the constitution.

[14](#). (C) In a series of meetings, imams, city council and business leaders have told poloff that voter registration continues to go well, with hundreds of residents signing up daily. They question the IECE's performance, capacity and neutrality. Fallujah officials sought U.S. assistance in pressing the case for same-day registration for Anbar residents, noting that while large numbers had successfully registered in Fallujah -- many Sunnis in other communities have not.

IMAMS: "NO RUSH TO JUDGMENT"

[15](#). (C) A leading city imam, Sheikh Abdul Sittar, told Fallujah Poloff August 30 that Fallujah clerics had not yet told people how to vote, stating "there is much in the constitution we like, but also a few important disagreements." He added that if the points of contention could be worked out, imams would urge residents to vote yes; if not, they would eventually exhort them to vote no.

GOVERNOR STRESSES ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

[16](#). (C) Provincial Governor Ma'moun indicated to Marine officers that he had not yet read the constitution and was unable to offer personal opinions about how it might be received in the province. However, he added that the role of religious leaders would be important in shaping Sunni views at the local level.

TRIBAL LEADERS: WE WILL
EDUCATE MEMBERS AND VOTE

[17](#). (C) During a September 3 meeting with six Fallujah-area tribal leaders, Fallujah Poloff and Marine Foreign Area Officer discussed local reactions to the constitution. The

sheikhs echoed that federalism remained the main sticking point -- arguing that Iraq's natural resources should not benefit just one part of the country (ie., north and south to the exclusion of Anbar Sunnis in the west). One sheikh acknowledged that the constitution was "a living document; unlike the immutable Quran." All looked to Baghdad for possible changes that would address continued Sunni concerns. They said they would continue to help educate their tribal members and encourage participation.

18. (C) Fallujah Poloff inquired about the extent to which Sunni political engagement in coming months would affect support for the insurgency. One tribal leader said that "there would be fewer IEDs . . . if unity is achieved." Tribal leaders also noted that intimidation tactics in Fallujah would largely be ineffective in the face of concerted efforts by imams and other city leaders who were advocating participation.

COMMENT

19. (C) These initial reactions among Al-Anbar Sunni Arabs reflect both skepticism and an apparent pragmatic mindset. Local Sunni leaders continue to digest and study the contents of the constitution and, so far, seem to have largely reserved judgment. The debate at the grass-roots level, not surprisingly, has focused more on operational issues (additional registration centers, same-day registration, more sites, etc.) and less on substantive arguments about the draft text.
Satterfield